



# The Chronicles of Amber

*Roger Zelazny*

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## **The Chronicles of Amber** Roger Zelazny

Amber is the one real world, casting infinite reflections of itself - shadow worlds, which can be manipulated by those of royal Amberite blood. But the royal family is torn apart by jealousies and suspicion; the disappearance of the patriarch Oberon has intensified the internal conflict by leaving the throne apparently for grabs; and amnesia has robbed Corwin, Crown Prince of Amber his memory - even the fact that he is rightful heir to the throne.

*The Chronicles of Amber* is Zelazny's finest fantasy, a grand imaginative vision of alternate worlds, magic, swordplay, and murderous rivalries.

1. Nine Princes in Amber 1-156
2. The Guns of Avalon 157-338
3. Sign of the Unicorn 338-490
4. The Hand of Oberon 491-640
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## **The Chronicles of Amber Details**

Date : Published 2003 by Gollancz (first published January 1st 1978)

ISBN : 9781857987263

Author : Roger Zelazny

Format : Paperback 772 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction

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## **From Reader Review The Chronicles of Amber for online ebook**

### **Mark says**

Read anything by Zelazny! His ability to craft a story that immediately draws the reader in is remarkable. He is one of the few authors who can not only get away with writing in the first person, but who excel at befriending the reader while doing so.

The Chronicles of Amber begins with the book, *Nine Princes in Amber*. It is a gripping mystery, and a contemporary fiction and fantasy novel all in one, and done very well. From the outset, the reader is pulled into action and intrigue.

The original series spanned five books. These five are sufficient to complete the Chronicles of Amber, but if you enjoyed them, you may as well enjoy the latter five books (however, my personal favorites are the original five of the series).

My favorite book of the series, without a doubt, is *The Guns of Avalon*. Wow. I refuse to tell you anything about it, except that I had to read it IMMEDIATELY after reading *Nine Princes in Amber* (a stupendous cliff-hanger - wow Zelazny shamelessly pulled out all the stops there!!).

Have fun! THIS CLASSIC IS A MUST for any serious Fantasy reader !

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### **Andrew CS T says**

I put that away before the last two books. I don't understand how such a boring, dull, sluggish, extremely protracted novel could get such positive reviews!?!? The whole story could have been shrunk into 300 pages but no, the whole Chronicles is like 1000 pages of boredom told in first person perspective which "per se" is boring!

The characters are dull, there is no development, and none of them became likeable. Hundreds of pages are about Corwin is thinking about something, well basically about nothing that matters! It's true, his thoughts doesn't even move the plot forward a bit, these pages would have been left out from the book.

The world of Amber could have been nice and interesting but Zelazny instead of elaborating it and make the reader to be interested in it just wrote extremely boring and repetitive junk about shifting the shapes in Shadows, and aimless empty dialogues between Corwin and his siblings.

Okay, many of the readers pointed out that it was written in the seventies, therefore this book is a bit slow and strange for a first time reader. Bull\*\*t, Moorcock wrote the *Corum Chronicles* back in the seventies too and that book is awesome!

*Chronicles of Amber* is a nice example of overrated US fantasy literature. It's a big book of nothing! A boring soap opera set in a fantasy universe.

I'm terribly sorry but I'm very dissatisfied. I tried to love this book but I couldn't. It was the worst fantasy novel I've ever read.

If you want to read fantasy about "multiversums" stick to Moorcock's Corum and forget about Zelazny's Corwin.

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## **JG (The Introverted Reader) says**

### **Review of *Nine Princes in Amber***

This is a tough book to summarize. Let's just say that Mr. Corey wakes up with amnesia after a nasty car crash and sets out to recover his memory and then to take back what he sees as his.

Starting this was a leap of faith. Corey tells the story and since he doesn't know anything about what's going on, neither do we. He's confused, we're confused, and I for one was left wondering if it was worth the effort to continue on. Luckily, I decided that since I'd heard so many good things about this author and since the book was only about 150 pages, I really had nothing to lose and possibly a lot to gain. Once I got going with the story and started getting tantalizing pieces about the story behind the story, I was hooked. Even after finishing, I have some questions, but I know that this series has to be worth the ride.

I love Zelazny's writing. He has a unique voice and some of his descriptions were incredibly original. Of course I didn't do anything useful like mark them, but here's one I did find again: "his skin was as porous as an orange rind and the elements had darkened it to resemble a fine old piece of furniture." Can't you just picture this guy's skin?

As much as I liked it, there were a couple of things I didn't care for. There's a big old *deus ex machina* at the end. (Here's hoping I got hold of the correct phrase) Maybe it will tie in later, but right now it just felt like an easy way out after he had painted himself into a corner.

This isn't really anything to do with the story, but my copy is chock-full of typos. It's easy enough to figure out what Zelazny meant most of the time, but there were a few instances where the sentence could work in a couple of different ways. There was at least one time when a few sentences were repeated for no reason. It got really distracting.

I'm going to give this three stars, mostly because of what I just mentioned and because I still have lots of questions about what exactly is going on. I'll definitely be continuing the series, and who knows? I might bump my rating up later.

### **The Guns of Avalon**

I don't have too much more to add except that the typos were better in this section and I'm hugely surprised that one story arc wrapped up as quickly as it did. I'm glad we got to see a few more members of the family. I *really* didn't see the big twist coming. It's still three stars and I'll still keep on reading.

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## **???? (Tarek) says**

I recently tried to read this book because it gets recommended all the time on the internet as a classic of the fantasy genre. I can't express my disappointment. It was dreadful, complete dross. It baffled me that this

book gets praised so highly to the extent that I keep going back to read reviews to try to find out how people could possibly like this. For reference, I stopped at page 200 after reading the first book. I wanted to like it so badly.

The book actually begins well. The premise is compelling. But once the opening is established and the protagonist goes on his quest, what's his motivation?? It's so stupid. He does it just because. No more explanation needed. The author seems to have a childish conception of what royalty means. As soon as the protagonist finds out he's royalty he immediately becomes dismissive of lesser beings and begins addressing others with the Queen's English. It's like the author felt that to be taken seriously Corwin has to be a condescending ass, completely dismissive of the lives of others.

Secondly the tone and writing. I haven't come across such weak writing in years. The narrator sounds like a New Yorker who's gone back in time to medieval England. In one line the protagonist sounds like your average American, then two lines later you get "How fare you, brother?" and "how goes the world with thee?" Amidst all this you get the distinct sense that this is a cast of characters out of Seinfeld. One character tells another that he has amazing "chutzpah". Corwin asks his brother how it's possible that Eric knows about their attack. His brother responds, "What do you think? Is he a cretin?" "No." "Then he knows."

Then come the fight scenes. Lord how I cringed when reading these. Here's a sample:

"I tried a head-cut, which he parried; and I parried his riposte to my heart and cut at his wrist. He parried this and kicked a small stool between us. I set it aside, hopefully in the direction of his face, with my right toe, but it missed and he had at me again. I parried his attack, and he mine. Then I lunged, was parried, was attacked, and parried again myself...I nicked him and the blood flowed. "Oh, damnable brother!" he said, retreating. "Report has it Random accompanies thee." "This is true," said I."

That's the quality of riveting prose you can expect. Every fight ever is apparently made up of nothing more than a series of parries and ripostes.

What's more, the author seems outright lazy. He'll take you on a multi-page scene and then suddenly wrap it up with something like "let's be brief".

"I shall not bore you with repetition. My second year was pretty much like my first, with the same finale. Ditto for the third." p. 139

"Let's just say I made it and was gasping.." p. 122

After a battle that runs on for several pages, it's as if the author tires himself out with his own wooden narration and tries to wrap it up:

"I'd probably have surrendered, to save my remaining troops, who had served me far too well. But there was no one to surrender to, no one asking for a surrender. Eric couldn't even hear me if I cried out. He was out of the way, directing. So we fought on, and I was down to a hundred men. Let's be brief. They killed everyone but me. At me they threw nets and unleashed blunted arrows."

You have to love that weakass attempt to finish with a flourish. The tone utterly changes from "I'd probably have surrendered" to "at me they threw nets".

So what have I missed? How is this series so highly rated?

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## Alendi says

Valoro aquí conjuntamente los cinco libros que componen la primera saga de Ámbar, porque en el fondo es más una sola historia dividida en cinco tomos que cinco partes semiindependientes.

Hacía tiempo que no disfrutaba tanto con una historia de fantasía. Aunque la historia en sí podría haber resultado típica en manos de otro escritor, Zelazny lleva tan bien la narrativa y crea unos personajes lo suficientemente buenos como para que el conjunto esté muy por encima de la media. Echo de menos que hoy en día ya no se lleven este tipo de historias, con una magia más libre, y más centradas en la aventura que en la acción, política e intrigas (y sexo y violencia).

La única pega que le veo a su narrativa (aparte de algunos aspectos de la narración que creo que son más obra del traductor que del autor) son las descripciones de los viajes por la Sombra. En cada libro pormenoriza cada pequeño cambio en el paisaje conforme este va cambiando, y cuando el único objetivo es mostrar la transición desde el punto inicial hasta el final, a la quinta vez que te lo muestra se vuelve tedioso. Por lo demás, es un genio a la hora de elegir qué contar, qué no y que resumir a posteriori. También me parece envidiable cómo parece que todo lo tenía planificado desde el primer libro, cuando ves pequeños comentarios, en apariencia irrelevantes, que posteriormente adquieren significado. Aunque al usar un sistema de magia bastante libre se podría pensar que se va sacando las ideas de la manga sobre la marcha, me da la sensación de que lo tenía todo estructurado desde el principio.

La otra pega que le podría poner es el papel de la mujer en el libro. Exceptuando un par de casos puntuales, el papel de las mujeres es irrelevante o está bastante maltratado. Otra obra producto de su época y ambiente. Independientemente de esto los libros merecen mucho la pena, y me quedo con ganas de leer más. Ah, no, que no están en castellano.

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## Dan Schwent says

**Nine Princes in Amber:** Mr. Corey wakes up in a hospital after a car accident with no memory of who he is. After visiting his sister (and fooling her into thinking he still has his memory), he crosses dimensions with his brother Random and eventually regains his memory after walking the Pattern in the city of Rebma, the sister city of Amber. From there, he joins up with his brother Bleys and attacks Amber, intent on stopping his brother Eric from crowning himself king.

Nine Princes in Amber is really good, especially considering all of the background Zelazny manages to cram into less than 150 pages. The twists are unexpected and the machinations of the nine princes of Amber are fairly realistic. Although I can tell it was inspired by the first book of the World of Tiers series, it's far from being a ripoff. Zelazny started with Farmer's concept of an amnesiac hero who's a member of a group of nigh-immortal lords and taken it into a different direction. I'm looking forward to Guns of Avalon.

**Guns of Avalon:** Corwin hatches a plan to take Amber with a force bearing automatic rifles along with Ganelon, an old enemy. Along the way he spends time with his brother Benedict and Benedict's great granddaughter Dara. However, he isn't the only one assaulting Amber...

Guns of Avalon was even better than Nine Princes in Amber. I'm really enjoying the court intrigue between Corwin and his siblings. I didn't really see the ending coming until it was too late. Zelazny really knows how to craft a tale.

**Sign of the Unicorn:** Another of Corwin's family is murdered, Brand is rescued, and more of what actually happened to Corwin prior to the first book is revealed.

The Amber books probably wouldn't work as well if Zelazny hadn't written them in the first person. The way they are, we learn things as Corwin does. The machinations of Corwin's family are the driving force of the story and we get to watch as Corwin peels away lair after lair.

**The Hand of Oberon:** I'm officially past the point where I can give a synopsis and not give away too many plot points. Suffice to say, Zelazny is quite a story teller and I'm approaching the final novel in this volume with a sense of anticipation I haven't felt since the last volume of The Dark Tower wound up in my mailbox years ago.

**The Courts of Chaos:** Who stabbed Corwin in the dark? Will Amber be destroyed by the forces of Chaos? Can the Pattern be repaired? Who will sit on the throne of Amber? All of these questions and more are answered in this, the final book of The First Chronicles of Amber.

Zelazny took the aspects of Farmer's World of Tiers he liked the most, namely the immortal family endlessly conspiring against one another and the amnesiac hero, and ran with it. Amber isn't so much a fantasy story as a huge multi-layered mystery. I thought I knew how it would end but I was wrong. I'm officially ranking Amber up there with Moorcock's Elric series (the first six or so) and Stephen King's Dark Tower as my favorite fantasy stories of all time.

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## **Alexandra Son says**

Let me just start by saying that I cannot remember how many times I have re-read these books. First I read it as a teenager on several occasions, then as a young adult and recently I have downloaded the audio books, and I am not bored yet. I actually remember being depressed for several days after I have finished the book for the first time because it was so good, I wished I could forget the plot to be able to read it as if for the first time... if that makes any sense.

As the series have been published for a while now I have come across countless plot descriptions and reviews many of which, in my opinion, do not even begin to cover the brilliance of the universe. Most begin by saying that this is a story of brother's fighting for the throne which was left vacant by a sudden disappearance of their father, the King. And, of course, all of that happens in the alternative fantasy universe. While these are essentially true, to me it sounds like any other number of fantasy books and so I do not feel like this general description is the best selling pitch for the book. So I will write down what I believe should interest any fantasy lover out there.

Let me start first with... our narrator himself, Corwin! He is still by far my most favourite male protagonist anywhere. Seriously, what is not to like about him? Handsome, a few thousand years old yet still perfectly preserved in his early 30s (and thank god, NOT A VAMPIRE!) but with all the wisdom and sarcasm of his age, strong, companionate, kind (as much as any prince of Amber can be, which is actually a key character development moment) and with a fantastic sense of humour – the books are filled with his little remarks

which are just priceless, though I admit, in order to understand most of them the reader has to have a broad literate and cultural knowledge. Of course, he is not all perfect and posses many negative qualities, pride and ambition being the main ones. However, overall he could be a perfect, yet quite realistic man (unless you like those sentimental lovey-dovey types of male characters).

Secondly, the Amber universe. If you like an idea of parallel or alternative worlds, you will love Amber series. In these books you can find anything: from something that is comfortable and familiar, i.e. our good old mother-earth, to something romantic and majestic – Amber and Avalon, and finally to worlds that will simply blow your mind away, like Courts of Chaos. There is a clear sense of origin and development of these worlds throughout the books, maybe slightly more of it in Merlin's cycle than in Corwin's. The worlds are incredibly thought through: their politics, history, power players, travel, anything you could think off. Geek out as much as you want!

Thirdly, the books go straight to the point. There are not longwinded conversations or side characters. The story evolves at a fast pace, full of action, yet it manages to clearly explain what is happening and why. Trust me, through Amber series, there is no time to get bored!

Finally, there is THE family. They are murderous, treacherous, dangerous, distrustful, violent, funny, ROYAL and completely crazy! All of them with their unique characters, sense of humour and skeletons in the closet. When you think have a character figured out, just turn the page and you will find out that you are so wrong, so very wrong! And it is impossible not to have favourites (I always loved fiery Fiona, after Corwin, of course)!

So if you have not read the series, you lucky people, go and plunge yourself into Roger Zelazny's universe, you will never regret this! So jealous of all of you about to read it for the first time!

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### **Matt Williamson says**

This was the edition that unlocked my mind and utterly destroyed my sense of self. In the reading of these books I became Corwin and in many ways I never left Amber.

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### **David Dalglish says**

I know people who say they like to read books because it takes them places. When you think of, say, Lord of the Rings, there's many awesome battles, but people also remember the sights themselves, from the quaint peaceful realms of Hobbiton, to the great city of Minas Tirith, to Sauron's tower rising out from a blackened land. Of course, it takes a lot of time to travel between them (and plenty of people are fond of complaining about it, too).

In Amber, characters travel between these majestic locations like you and I might walk from one street block to the next. Zelazny is willing to show you -anything- he can dream up, and his imagination alone is worthy of deeming this collection a classic.

Almost as important is his reach. He's not telling a story of a kingdom surviving the attack of an enemy. Oh no. That isn't big enough. Imagine a million alternate worlds, and then run a black road through them all,



spreading destruction as it grows to encompass every world, every city, every creature imaginable. In the center of all these alternate worlds is Amber, sort of like the pillar holding everything together. Should it fall, so does all else. Tolkien wanted to show the battle for one single Middle Earth. Zelazny wants to show a war to save billions.

The main narrator is Corwin (yes, it is first person, but don't worry, the writing is a masterful combination of beauty and down-to-earth jokes and grumblings). He wakes up in a hospital, with no memory of who he is, what happened, but my isn't it peculiar how his broken legs are healed so quickly? From there he encounters his family person by person. They backstab, deal, threaten, switch sides a hundred times, and all can walk through shadows to whatever realm they wish. I loved every second of it.

The series starts to bog down around the third book. The climactic fights, which sometimes feel like a boy grabbed various action figures and started slamming them together (go, go, wolfman army, shoot down those pterodactyls! Oh no, knights in armor, fire fire fire!), grow less frequent. There is a LOT of talking, and while it is usually spaced out well, near the middle there is so much, trying to establish who is friends with who, what happened to what, etc.

By the end of the book, I loved the narrator, adored the city of Amber, felt like I personally knew the various princes and princesses of the city, and sorely wished I had more. I checked the next five books, and was sad to see the narrator was not the same. Oh well. Farewell, Corwin. You gave me one heck of a ride.

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## **Aless says**

Page 360 abandoned

So I read parts 1 and 2, and I'm around halfway, but I don't want to do it anymore.

I found the first book kind of slow, but it started to get more interesting near the end, so I thought it was just a slow start to set up the whole story. Part 2 went back to slow again and dragged most of the way through.

I'm thinking either I'm not compatible with old fantasy, or compared to modern fantasy it's not very good. I did really like a few elements of this book, the writing style was strange but the language used was interesting with a lot of words I've never heard of. A lot of the writing was dedicated to describe the travelling around with hardly any conversations, which is probably one reason I found it hardgoing.

Initially the relationships of the royal family were interesting, but they weren't being expanded on much. The infinite shadow worlds idea was fairly unique, but we're told how absolutely amazing Amber is and I wasn't feeling it. Corwin and the other characters were believable in personality but I cared about none of them. I would have been happy to find out more about the other siblings, especially the sisters as they are barely mentioned, only really in a derogatory way. The women are seen as inferior and minor which was quite annoying.

I really tried, but my eyes have just been falling off the pages.

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## **Simon says**

This edition collects what was originally a series of five books into a single volume.

Looking at the other reviews of this book, I am surprised at how many people have reviewed each book separately. That really is a pointless exercise; in my opinion these books should be read as a whole or not at all. They do not stand alone and there is no point in reading any of them individually or out-of-order. It is one continuous story arc.

I have also noticed that many reviewers have included details of the actual story which I try to avoid at the best of times and this is one instance in which it is really much better if you know nothing about what it is about or going to happen.

This is not one of those books in which you need to read several chapters before beginning to become engrossed. There is no period of scene setting in which the characters are established. The action and excitement begin right away and you as the reader are as in the dark as the protagonist is who begins by awakening in hospital with no memory of who he is or how he got there. You are drawn into the story as you discover things about the protagonist and his world through his eyes as he rediscovers them and gets his memory back. This is an excellent way to introduce the reader to the complexity of this fantastic world and the intrigue that might otherwise threaten to overwhelm if a more conventional introduction technique were employed.

I normally like to break up a series by reading other books in between even when they are collected in a single volume but I found I just couldn't in this case. I was gripped and had to read on to the finish. An absolute classic that every fantasy reader should find time for.

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### **Nebojša Petkovi? says**

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### **Robert Kroese says**

I was first exposed to Roger Zelazny's Amber books when I was in college. I'm sure I was trying to avoid reading Plato's Republic or Machiavelli's The Prince at the time. Whatever the reason for picking up the book, I still remember the thrill I got from the first few chapters of Nine Princes in Amber, where the hero wakes up in a hospital with amnesia and gradually comes to discover who he really is: a Prince of Amber, the one true world, of which all other worlds (including Earth) are merely shadows.

I don't know if the amnesiac-hero-who-is-more-than-he-seems was already a cliché by the time Zelazny wrote Nine Princes in Amber in the early 70s, but it certainly is now. The obvious example is Ludlum's Bourne franchise; other examples from cinema include Memento and The Long Kiss Goodnight. The idea

has a long history in sci-fi as well. Of the top of my head I can think of Robert Silverberg's Valentine books and the movies Total Recall and Dark City. And if you include stories that feature a protagonist who is unaware of his/her True Identity for some reason other than amnesia, the list grows to include close to half of the sci-fi and fantasy stories out there, including the Harry Potter books, The Matrix and Star Wars.

Somehow, though, Prince Corwin of Amber stands out. I think it's because for Corwin, amnesia isn't a convenient escape from a sinister and troubling world (as it is for nearly every other amnesiac or otherwise cognitively deficient hero in books and movies); it's an unwanted exile from reality, in a very literal sense. There's no real question of Prince Corwin settling down and living a normal life on Earth (like Cypher in the Matrix, who chooses to have his memory re-wiped rather than deal with the true reality). Nor does he have to be informed, like Charlie in The Long Kiss Goodnight, that he's been living a lie. He knows something isn't right, and he's going to figure out what it is and who is responsible – and then kill them.

Corwin doesn't stagger from chapter to chapter exclaiming, "No! It can't be!", as is typical in amnesiac-comes-to-grips-with-reality stories. He remains poker-faced throughout, hiding his ignorance in an attempt to get the other characters to fill him in on what's happening. The setting of the Chronicles of Amber may be fantastical, but Corwin remains pragmatic and no-nonsense. He's like the Philip Marlowe of epic fantasy adventures: cunning, violent, and mostly amoral, at least at first.

It's the interplay of these two elements, the fantastical world of Amber and its shadows, along with the pragmatic, incongruous and occasionally heroic Corwin, that makes the Chronicles of Amber so fascinating. A lot of the conventions of high fantasy make appearances: magical swords (and lots of sword-fighting); kings, princes and princesses; great battles featuring human and almost-human creatures; various mythological monsters; etc., but one key element is missing: destiny. It's never clear that Corwin is going to be victorious, or what being victorious would consist of. A lot of the time it's unclear who he's actually fighting against. Corwin stumbles along making the best decisions he can, sometimes thinking only of saving his own skin, sometimes acting out of anger, and every once in a while doing something admirable. As a Prince of Amber, Corwin has the power to create whole new worlds out of shadow, so he literally makes things up as he goes along. He is probably the very first existentialist fantasy hero.

The later books aren't quite as much fun as the first few, as Corwin gets bogged down in politics and hemmed in by his growing sense of duty. On one hand, it's nice to see a hero actually grow and change as a person throughout the books; on the other hand, it's a little disappointing to see an iconoclastic antihero like Corwin drafted into a more conventional heroic role. There's no way around it, I suppose: everybody has to grow up sometime.

I highly recommend this series. The first couple of books in particular are hard to put down, and once you get started you're going to want to see how things end.

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## ?????? ?????? says

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## **Bbrown says**

On the plus side The Chronicles of Amber has an interesting universe and an epic scope, but on the other hand Zelazny's unimpressive writing and inability to breathe life into that universe means that the series becomes a slog.

Right off the bat the protagonist Corwin wakes up with amnesia- cliché to the extreme, but let's be charitable. From there the book introduces its setting, one where there is a central universe and numerous others that are mere shadows cast by that one- our universe being one of those shadows. As a prince of amber Corwin has mastery over this multiverse far more so than others, but his abilities are not unique. Instead he has an extended family that shares his powers, some being allies and some enemies. While the extensive family opens up the possibility for manifold machinations and schemes, few of the characters feel developed in the slightest. Most can be defined by one or two traits. I would much rather have had the family be half the size but more developed, but instead we're left with various names that it's hard to care about. Random is crowned regent in the end- but because Random isn't a character with any depth I'm left not caring. Why is Random crowned and not another member of the family? Perhaps his name was picked out of a hat- there isn't any sufficient explanation in the first five volumes at least.

Speaking of the first five volumes, I began the sixth as well, but I honestly just couldn't force myself to read any more of Zelazny's writing. It's mediocre, but not in an inoffensive way: read him for long enough and it becomes grating to the extreme. Corwin navigates many a strange universe, but a) they're not as creative or inventive as they should be, 2) there is only a connection to Amber about half the time, with the other half being universes that Zelazny just thought would be cool, and 3) Zelazny's writing isn't strong enough to imbue this exploration with any sense of wonder or discovery. They are reduced to places that Corwin must go to do this thing that advances the plot. What fun. There's a universe here that might warrant a ten-volume series almost the length of War & Peace, but if so Zelazny isn't the one to deliver it. What should be a fun and creative series to read is instead overwhelmingly bland.

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## **?????? ?????? says**

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## **Wendy says**

This book was fervently recommended by a friend, and, being an obsessive compulsive book shopper, I bought it almost immediately. When I started reading it, I was both surprised and impressed by the responses I got to my posts on Facebook, Twitter, Goodreads and Google+ – all praising the Chronicles of Amber and/or Zelazny himself. Clearly I had missed out on something very important and my impulse shopping was not in vain.

Amber is a realm that casts hundreds of shadows of itself, each one easily manipulated by those of royal blood, including Corwin, whom we first meet as an amnesia patient in the hospital under questionable

circumstances. Despite his memory loss, his wits slip him out of captivity and into the home of his sister, where he slowly tries to piece his history together. Knowing nothing of Amber, who's trying to kill Corwin, or the Trump cards that he finds, each depicting a person he comes to recognize as a sibling, the reader gets to tag along on this curious journey of discovery. Corwin is soon joined by his brother Random who is fleeing mysterious and deadly assailants. Together they make their way back to Amber in a bizarre process that sets the tone for the unusual way magic works in Zelazny's world.

As the threads unwind and Corwin's memory returns, we learn that the king of Amber is missing, presumed dead, and one of the nine princes, Eric, has assumed the throne. Corwin is determined to usurp his brother's rule and sets about building an army.

After the first book, which managed to go from memory loss, to walking the Pattern, to all out war in such a brief time, I quickly came to understand that nothing would be as I expected – including the motivations of each of the siblings and their companions. Zelazny fashions an unbelievably intense story of sibling rivalry, within a fantasy setting unlike any other. The transitions between worlds is so smooth and the language a perfect blend of contemporary and everything else. But the most striking thing for me was the way, as each book progressed, I felt like Zelazny was simply writing everything that spilled from his mind. It felt like he was adding twists and turns and new elements as they came to him – but everything fit in place like the world's most perfect Tetris game. And when I got to the end of book four's big reveal. Well .. fuuuuhh....

Side note: The book focuses mainly on Corwin and his interactions with his male companions and brothers. Initially, his sisters and the other women who vaguely show up are considered little more than useless fools. Fortunately, Zelazny seemed to gain a bit more respect for females by book four and five and the women at least served a bit more purpose and earned the respect of the nice men in their lives, too. Sort of.

I actually bought the The Great Book of Amber, which includes ten stories within this world. The first five deal with Corwin's incredible journey, while the second half follows his son Merlin. I have heard that the second half is not quite as good as the first. While this doesn't deter me from continuing on eventually, I decided to focus on Corwin alone for this review.

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## **Mike (the Paladin) says**

I was actually introduced to this series in 1974, but didn't track the rest down for a couple of years. I love these books and have read them over and over, so.... These are wonderful reads and have a personality all their own.

This is a fantasy not to be missed. The first series is superior, but they are both good reads.

Should I give any details? Can I without spoilers? These are great.

The world building (multi-verse building?) here is not only superb but it's so well incorporated into the overall tale you really don't think about it all that much. That's saying something as it's one of the more "sweeping" creations in fantasy. The characters in this series are complete, true to themselves, and detailed

without a lot of wordy description getting in the way of the story. I'd say that the books (the story) is plot driven, but I don't want to mislead. It in many ways is both character and plot driven. Very well done, at least in the first series. While the second series is the weaker of the two it to is enjoyable and worth reading.

Okay..no spoilers. These are highly recommended and if you're a fantasy fan who hasn't discovered them I think you have something to look forward to.

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## **Cassandra says**

For me, this series started stronger than it finished. Zelazny set up quite a number of interesting conflicts, which then resolved much too suddenly. I wanted to spend more time with the other family members, see more of the inhabitants of the Courts of Chaos, know more about Dara and her motives. Also, where did Benedict go? I don't remember seeing him in the final conflict at all. I wanted a proper denouement for my favorite character. The dynamics in the scene when all the remaining siblings gather to banter and backstab (heh) sizzle and crack and sparkle. Why couldn't there have been more of that?

I wanted more, and I also wanted less--less of the acid-trippy descriptions of Shadow which seemed to occupy the bulk of the page-space, and which, to be honest, I started skipping over after the first few. This series bogs down in places with painstaking detail, then hurtles ahead in spurts and bounds, hopping over entire months in a brief paragraph or two. The pace is so uneven as to create motion sickness. But then Zelazny seems to hit a groove again, and we get these delightful, cracking moments. For example, Dara's first introduction: she corners the bemused hero and insists he fence with her before treating him to a picnic lunch, and weasles a crash course on all things Amber out of him. (c'mon, you don't have to be psychic to see where THAT was heading.) Likewise with the conversation between Corwin and Ganelan at Corwin's tomb.

Despite the issues I have with the pacing, lack of character development (or perhaps I should say character exposition; all the characters change, but in some cases we are told, not shown), and unsatisfying conclusion, this is worth reading, if only for a break from your typical fantasy fare. Four stars for the quirkiness of the prose, the spectacular banter, the hysterical literary references, and sheer cussed inventiveness.

Some favorite moments:

"To paraphrase Oedipus, Hamlet, Lear, and all those guys, "I wish I had known this some time ago."

"Strygalldwir is my name. Conjure with it and I will eat your heart and liver."

"Conjure with it? I can't even pronounce it, and my cirrhosis would give you indigestion."

"Of course it does not apply to me. I am the soul of honor, kindness, mercy and goodness. Trust me in all things."

"I would never rest until I held vengeance and the throne within my hand, and good night sweet prince to anybody who stood between me and these things."

"Ill met by moonlight,' said Deirdre.

'You could still be tied to a stake,' said Random, and she did not reply."

“The most difficult thing about Time, I have learned, is doing it.”

Summing up the entire series pretty nicely:

“There are none of you, good doctors, could cope with my family anyway.”

And finally, hurrah for author cameos!

“Good evening, Lord Corwin,' said the lean, cadaverous figure who rested against a storage rack, smoking his pipe, grinning around it.

'Good evening, Roger. How are things in the nether world?'

'A rat, a bat, a spider. Nothing much else astir. Peaceful.'

'You enjoy this duty?'

He nodded. 'I am writing a philosophical romance shot through with elements of horror and morbidity. I work on those parts down here.'”

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## **Chris says**

It is more than the sum of its parts. That description really fits with the first Amber Chronicles. Each book, on its own, was to me a four-star. They were all very enjoyable (and addicting) but they don't really stand on their own. But by the time you put all five together, you have one hell of a great story that deserves no less than 5 stars.

I've heard great things about the Amber series for years, and I finally broke down and tried them. I sure am glad that I did. I can see that this will be a series that I will need to read again someday, as its multiple layers will show things through a re-read that might have been overlooked the first time through.

The other thing I can say for sure is that I will be looking to read the Second Chronicles soon. All roads lead to Amber...

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